City of Seattle
Michael McGinn, Mayor

BRIEFING MEMO

Date: April 2, 2010

To: Councilmember Nick Licata, Chair, Housing, Human Services &
                      Culture Committee

From: Sola Plumacher, Human Services Department,
                      Safe Harbors Manager (3-9404)

Subject: Safe Harbors Review and Current Status

Purpose of Briefing
The Safe Harbors briefing will provide an overview of the objectives of the program and current status now that the new system implementation is complete.

Overall policy/project objectives
Safe Harbors' Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) compiles data on the homeless and at-risk population being served by publicly-funded homeless housing and service agencies in Seattle and King County. The data collected by Safe Harbors helps drive policy and funding decisions regarding housing and shelter programs, safety net services, and prevention efforts to keep those at risk of homelessness from becoming homeless.

Safe Harbors Background:
Safe Harbors HMIS is a federally and state-mandated data collection tool aimed at assisting communities in capturing information about the history and demographic composition of the homeless population and those who are at-risk of homelessness, as well as information about the services they receive, in an effort to understand how we can better prevent homelessness. The data collected helps policy makers at all levels of government understand the scope and nature of homelessness in the Seattle-King County area. Furthermore, implementation of HMIS will help to ensure continued federal and state funding for homeless and housing services.

Safe Harbors currently collects data only from publicly funded programs, with the intent of working with privately funded programs in the future. Two hundred and eighty one programs are now submitting data to HMIS as compared to only 170 in 2008. Data on persons not accessing publicly funded shelter or supportive service programs are not collected in Safe Harbors. The One Night Count of unsheltered persons continues to be our most referred to data on this population.

The emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing system in Seattle/King County operates approximately 8,417 beds in 308 programs throughout the year, through both publicly and privately funded shelter and transitional housing programs. Safe Harbors collects identified data from 281, or 91%, of those programs via

direct data entry or data integration, representing 85% of the total beds operated in Seattle/King County.

Results of 2008 Next Steps:
We reported to City Council in 2008 that our next steps would be to provide our partner service agencies with:

- Tools that will better equip agencies with the external reporting they need to meet a variety of funding requirements;
- Enhanced technology to aid in expediting the data entry process, easing the reporting burden on participating programs;
- Quality assurance tools that will enable Safe Harbors staff to track system usage agency by agency in an effort to monitor contractual compliance for all of our stakeholders; and
- Outcome management tools that track agency and program success in effective service delivery.

To accomplish this with Safe Harbors II, we completed the following:

- Provided comprehensive ongoing training and help desk support to all agencies (which has proven critical to provide constant and thorough oversight to guarantee system compliance). Agency staff turnover requires that Safe Harbors staff are available long term to address training needs in an effort to maintain data entry efforts. It is expected that training and support will always be a staffing need of the project because of the fluctuating nature of our participating programs.
- Developed Standard Operating Procedures for system participation.
- Strengthened contract language to specifically define what complete participation in HMIS means (i.e., entering full information in required fields when informed consent allows; uploading data via data integration on specified dates).
- Implemented new agency contracts with strong accountability language that ties full participation to funding. If agencies do not fully participate, City, County and United Way funders can withhold payment until the agency becomes compliant.
- Monitored data entry for contractual compliance and communicated with stakeholders regarding data deficiencies in a proactive manner.

Our results were as follows:
- We increased agency participation to 85% overall with the only outliers being non-publicly funded shelter programs.
- We have actively engaged the service providers in making Safe Harbors a tool they can use.
- Paperless reporting was started with the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP), funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus funding) and continues with state-funded programs.
- Safe Harbors was able to participate in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) for Congress which will likely result in bonus points that may provide the boost we need to obtain bonus funding for new projects. (See attached report.)

<u>Next Steps:</u>
- Safe Harbors will continue to work with programs to use the system more effectively and refine our system to meet the needs of varying providers.
- Safe Harbors will train agency staff on using the system for reporting.
- Safe Harbors staff will refine our help desk processes and leverage other City resources to better track help desk requests.
- Safe Harbors will complete an annual Safe Harbors report for 2009 data by June 30.

As we continue to gather data, trends will begin to emerge that will help us determine how best to reach our goals of moving people to permanent housing and reducing the number of people entering the homeless system.